DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 411 CS 503 049

AUTHOR Houser, William Evan
TITLE Essentially Contested Concepts Revisited.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (Ocean City, MD, March 24-26, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Processes; *Concept Formation; Conflict; Conflict Resolution; Fundamental Concepts; *Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric; Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

The roles that essentially contested concepts play in persuasive discourse are examined in this paper. The first section of the paper reviews W. B. Gallie's original explication of the nature of essentially contested concepts and the body of theoretical literature that has developed in response to it. It then notes three major areas of disagreement that have arisen within the theoretical literature: (1) whether the definition of an essentially contested concept can be resolved, (2) whether an exemplar must exist in order for a concept to be essentially contested, and (3) whether essentially contested concepts are rooted in rhetorical argument. The second section of the paper analyzes and responds to these three areas of theoretical conflict. It then uses the responses as a foundation for the creation of a consistent and coherent perspective on both the nature of essentially contested concepts and on the roles that they may play in persuasive discourse. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED192411

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPTS REVISITED

A Paper Presented at the
Eastern Communication Association Convention
March 26, 1980

William Evan Houser
Department of Communication Studies
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William Evan Houser

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS503049

ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPTS REVISITED

Walter Lippman begins his classic study, Public Opinion, with a brief introductory essay entitled "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads."[1] Within the essay, Lippman argues that individuals use "interior representations" of the world as ". . . a determining element in thought, feeling, and action."[2] Lippman calls these representations "pseudo-environments" and explains their existence by arguing that:

> . . . the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtelty, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simple model before we can manage with it.[3]

However, the above argument raises a serious question in that, if each individual "reconstructs" in his mind an image of the outside world, how accurate is this simple model? Lippman appears to have anticipated this question, and responds as follows:

> To traverse the world men must have maps of the world. Their persistent difficulty is to secure maps on which their own need, or someone else's need has not sketched in the coast of Bohemia.[4]

Concepts, per se, may be viewed as one form of map available to individuals in their respective and intersubjective attempts at mental cartography. In this regard, the following essay will examine the roles which a specific form of concept, that is essentially contested concepts, may play in persuasive discourse. The examination itself will be divided into two major sections. The first section will review W.B. Gallie's original explication of the nature of essentially contested concepts, plus the body of theoretical literature which has developed in response. But as shall be seen shortly, three major areas of disagreement have arisen within the theoretical literature. Unfortunately, the disagreement has served to muddle our current picture of the nature of essentially contested concepts. Consequently, the second section will analyze and respond to the three areas of theoretical conflict. The responses will then serve as a groundwork for the creation of a consistent and coherent perspective on both the nature of essentially contested concepts and the roles which they may play in persuasive discourse.

Essentially Contested Concepts -- An Overview of the Theoretical Literature.

In light of Lippmann's analysis, the meaning of a concept could be open to dispute should someone doubt the concept's ability to correctly categorize some aspect of reality. George Herbert Mead for example, agreed with John B. Watson that social psychology should be grounded in the observation of behavior. But Mead contended that Watson's

brand of "behaviorism" was inadequate because Watson only observed "external behavior" and refused to observe the "inner experience" of "consciousness."[5] Consequently, Mead was disputing Watson's use of the concept of behaviorism in social psychology. Similar conceptual disputes occur in a number of academic and nonacademic fields, a situation which is examined by W.B. Gallie in a landmark essay entitled "Essentially Contested Concepts."[6]

Gallie begins his study by asserting that: "Any particular use of any concept of commonsense or of the natural sciences is liable to be contested for reasons better or worse; . . ."[7] And when these disputes occur, the history of philosophy has shown that three methods of "elucidation" are available to resolve the disagreement.[8] The first method involves discovering a common meaning for the contested concept that all disputants can agree to. This in effect, assumes that a common ground can be found in some disputes and all those involved in the dispute could safely accept a meaning that had been obfuscated by their respective perspectives. The second method involves the creation of a totally new meaning for the contested concept. In this situation, the disputants can be urged to conform to the new definition as it makes their previous definitions inadequate. In the third method, someone must "explain the necessity (relative to certain explanatory conditions) of the contested character of the concept in question, . . ."[9] In this circumstance, the disputants realize that they can never resolve their debate and, therefore, agree to disagree.

Gallie asserts, however, that there are certain concepts the elucidation of which cannot be covered by the three methods listed above. He states that these concepts "relate to a number of organized--or semi-organized human activities: in academic terms they belong to aesthetics, to political philosophy, to the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion."[10] With regard to these areas, one can find people who disagree about the proper use of "concepts, e.g. of art, democracy, of the Christian tradition."[11] And when these concepts are examined, the researcher finds that "there is no one clearly definable general use of any of them which can be set up as the correct or standard use."[12] At this point, the situation is analogous to what may result when the third method of elucidation is employed. But Gallie contends there is a difference, in that once the "variety of functions" for the term is revealed, the disputants do not end their argument by agreeing to disagree. Rather, each side ignores the contention that the proper meaning and use of the concept cannot be resolved and, therefore, each side continues to assert their position in the debate is correct. Thus, Gallie contends these concepts are "essentially contested."[13]

To clarify his argument, Gallie offers a number of examples, among which is the concept of "a Christian life." According to Gallie, this concept is ascribed to by most individuals and religious groups that consider themselves "Christian." However, due to their respective doctrines, they do not agree as to how one should live the Christian life; and many of them adamantly insist that their respective view of Christianity is the correct and only one.[14]

In all, Gallie discusses five examples of essentially contested concepts. These include the aforementioned concepts of art, democracy, the Christian life and the Christian tradition; the other being "social justice."[15] Gallie uses these examples to clarify the seven conditions which he posits must be met by a concept in order to be essentially contested. The first five of these conditions are as follows:

> (I) it must be appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement. (II) This achievement must be of an internally complex character, . . . (III) Any explanation of its worth must therefore include reference to the respective contributions of its various parts or features; . . . In fine, the accredited achievement is initially variously describable. (IV) The accredited achievement must be of a kind that admits of considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances; and such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance. . . . (V) that each party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question.[16]

After he outlines the first five conditions, Gallie contends that they could also be applied to debates in which the disputants are actually arguing about more than one concept. Therefore, to differentiate between disputes over essentially contested concepts and disputes over "radically confused" concepts, Gallie offers his last two conditions, which are:

> (VI) the derivation of any such concept from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept, and (VII) the

> probability or plausibility in appropriate senses of these terms, of the claim that the continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestant users of the concept, enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion.[17]

The existence of an exemplar, then, is the necessary condition which must be met for a concept to be essentially contested. In this light, Gallie asserts that the concept of a Christian life has an "obvious" exemplar.[18] But the exemplar does not have to be a human being or a deity. For example, in the case of art, the exemplar could be a "particular artistic tradition or set of traditions."[19]

Although Gallie's article was originally published over twenty years ago, it has received very little attention in the field of philosophy or other areas of scholarship. However, several articles have been written to refine Gallie's original theory and to apply it to concrete situations. The first major application of the theory may be found in an article by Alasdair MacIntyre entitled: "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts."[20] MacIntyre's major assertion is that: "The lack of even provisional and temporary closure to debatability in certain areas of social inquiry suggest that perhaps we have not only essential incompleteness [in our understanding of those areas] but also essential contestability in those areas."[21] To support his assertion, MacIntyre argues that in the social sciences: "The behavior that is captured by the concept of a political party or a family or an army or a social class is itself behavior informed by the concept in question."[22]

So the people who engage in the activity covered by the concept have certain beliefs about the concept and these beliefs affect their actions vis-à-vis the concept. Since the beliefs held by the people may change, their definition of the concept may change. It is this possibility that creates essential contestability.[23] From this contention, MacIntyre asserts that once the nature of a social concept in a certain time has been identified we must "acknowledge a kind of inability in respect to its application in future instances . . ."[24]

In response to MacIntyre's essay, Norman S. Care agrees that some social concepts can be essentially contestable.[25] But he disagrees with the focus taken by MacIntyre. Care argues that the social scientist must look at the perspective taken by the participants within a dispute over the meaning of a concept. Care contends that MacIntyre places his primary attention on how the meaning of a concept changes over a period of time. But if a participant perspective is taken, Care asserts, it is possible to find groups which have resolved the meaning of an essentially contested concept for themselves and have, consequently, achieved "practical closure."[26] This closure may be gained by the participants via such activities as: "decision, resolution, agreement, consensus, ruling, voting result, . . . bargaining, judicial review, compromise, or mild or severe forms of pressure or coercion."[27] Once practical closure is achieved it is possible to predict how the group, who achieved closure, will apply the concept in the immediate future.

A similar position to that of Care, is taken by John Kekes in an article entitled: "Essentially Contested Concepts," which appeared in Philosophy and Rhetoric.[28] Kekes agrees with Gallie that it is possible to engage in a dispute over the proper meaning of a concept without actually engaging in the discussion of two or more different concepts. However, Kekes disagrees with two basic issues raised in Gallie's analysis of essentially contested concepts. First, Kekes does not agree that the arguments over essentially contested concepts are "incapable of resolution;" and second, he believes exemplars are unnecessary.[29]

With regard to the first area of disagreement, Kekes posits the idea that essentially contested concepts center around the search by groups of individuals to resolve "problem areas" in their lives. According to Kekes, there are three major problem-areas which people face, these being:

> The first type of problem produces such goals as the satisfaction of various physiological needs, health, shelter and protection, generally speaking, physical security and well-being. The second problem-area yields goals having to do with politics, morality, the law, manners, and mores. The third type concerns the pursuit of a rich and interesting internal life; . . .[30]

The debates over essentially contested concepts, then, concern which policies should be carried out to resolve the problems faced by a group or collection of groups. Kekes goes on to assert that a "rational decision" can be reached on which policy to adopt, an action which resolves the essentially contested nature of the concept in dispute.[31] Unfortunately,

Kekes does not support the validity of his claim by offering any examples of where such a resolution has occurred.[32]

Turning to Gallie's use of "an historical exemplar," Kekes states this is "quite unsatisfactory," because "it has a dystopian bias: things proceed from past ideals to present attempts at imitation."[33] From this comment, Kekes asks:

> And what is the exemplar from which philosophy, culture, nature, etc., are derived anyway? In some cases there is indeed a clear exemplar. Jesus is the exemplar, in just the required sense, for Christianity. But who is the saviour of the novel, of poetry, of nature?[34]

Kekes does not attempt to answer his question directly; and does not consider Gallie's contention that an exemplar may in fact be a tradition or set of traditions. Kekes does, however, claim that an exemplar must be "an instance par excellence, otherwise it would not have the requisite authority."[35] Kekes continues his attack on the necessity of exemplars by claiming Gallie is inconsistent in that he allows "present practice" to "constitute an improvement upon the historical exemplar."[36] Yet, Kekes points out, Gallie does not provide criteria for a critic to use in judging whether or not present practice is an improvement or a deviation from the exemplar. Without a set of criteria for judgment and only the exemplar, Kekes claims "the facts merely licence the observation that a practice constitutes a good departure from it [the exemplar]."[37] With this argument in mind, Kekes abandons the need for an exemplar and argues for the problem solving approach outlined above.[38]

Eugene Garver attempts to rescue Gallie's theory from Kekes' attacks by examining essentially contested concepts in light of Aristotle's Rhetoric.[39] Garver contends the essential contestability of a concept does not come from "some intrinsic attribute of the concept itself . . ."[40] Rather, a concept becomes essentially contested when it is defined by rhetorical arguments which are essentially contested in the first place, and are so in the following three senses:

> As opposed to science, rhetorical arguments are rarely necessary; the ideal of a rhetorical argument is to construct not an invulnerable argument but the best argument possible in a particular situation. As opposed to dialectic, rhetorical arguments are never final; the ideal of a rhetorical argument is not to silence the opposition forever but to take the opinions of one audience in one situation and make those opinions lead, as best one can, to a particular verdict. Finally, as opposed to sophistical and atechnical argument, rhetorical arguments keep the controversy centered on the arguments themselves; the ideal of rhetorical argument is not victory as such and at any cost but doing the best in the situation by means of argument.[41]

As an illustration of the importance of argumentation to the essential contestability of some concepts, Garver discusses the differing treatments of happiness in Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics and Rhetoric. Garver asserts that "happiness is an essentially contested concept in the Rhetoric and a concept whose meaning is settled in the Ethics."[42]

Starting with the Ethics, Garver shows that in the first book of the work, "Aristotle points out that there is considerable

verbal agreement that happiness is the good for man, but that it is unclear whether that agreement is not merely verbal (I.iv.)."[43] Garver goes on to argue that at this point in the Ethics it is "an open question" whether these people share the same concept of happiness or they are in fact dealing with "several concepts sharing the same name." Aristotle reaches an answer, by looking at "the function of man (I.vii), [and] a definition of happiness (I.xiii)." Aristotle defines happiness, then, as "activity in accordance with virtue;" and Garver asserts that in this light,

> . . . those who would identify happiness with honor, pleasure, or money, are simply wrong; once the definition of happiness is established, it is no longer a concept whose use, in Gallie's phrase inevitably involves disagreement about its proper use . . .

Turning to the Rhetoric, Garver contends that in this work, Aristotle leaves the concept of happiness open to argumentation and does so via the following definition of the concept:

> Let us then define happiness as well-being combined with virtue, or independence of life, or the life that is most agreeable combined with security, or abundance of possessions and slaves, combined with power to protect and make use of them; for nearly all men admit that one or more of these things constitute happiness (I.v.).[44]

Aristotle, thus, offers a four part definition in which the subdivisions are connected by the word "or." To Garver, "or" creates a state of essential contestability vis-à-vis the concept of happiness, because each of the four subdivisions "can seem to lead to opposed recommendations of policy, and these meanings

or parts of happiness therefore have to be weighted against each other in particular decisions."[45]

Garver's examination of the definitions of happiness in the Ethics and Rhetoric, therefore, demonstrates how a concept can become essentially contested via the arguments used to define and implement the concept. But, it should be emphasized Garver believes only rhetorical arguments can create essential contestability; and it is within the framework of rhetorical arguments that Garver finds room for Gallie's notion of the exemplar.

To Garver, exemplars are the same thing as examples; but he is careful to point out that "examples can usually be found in any discussion."[46] Yet, Garver sees this situation as further support for his suggestion that one must consider "essentially contested concepts in the context of essentially contested [i.e. rhetorical] arguments."[47] His rationale for this contention lies in the fact that:

> One of the two kinds of rhetorical argument for Aristotle is the example, and it is as kind of argument (and as material for argument (II.xxv.1402b16) that examples often give unity to disputes involving essentially contested concepts. The crucial point here is that the examples are in the argument, not in an external referent of the concept.[48]

Garver goes on to demonstrate how examples were used to provide unity to the debate over the meaning of the Roman Republic at the time of Virgil and the debate among philosophers--from Hobbes through Hume--over the meaning of government. The former debate appealed to the story of Aeneas, as it appeared

in a poem by Virgil. The latter appealed to the notion of "state of nature."[49]

Garver realizes that his article raises more questions than it answers, so he ends the piece with a series of questions concerning rhetorical arguments and essentially contested concepts which should be examined in future research and theory. Garver prefaces his questions by remarking that Aristotle's Rhetoric "shows us what a good rhetorical argument is, . . ."[50] But Garver contends that Aristotle does this from the speaker's viewpoint and not from the perspective of the audience. Garver, subsequently, asks: "By what standards and methods of judgment should an audience evaluate a rhetorical argument?" Turning to the perspective of the theoretician--who may be a rhetor and audience member--Garver wonders: "By what standards and methods should the theoretician evaluate essentially contested concepts?" Garver continues by re-emphasizing an idea raised by Care and Kekes, i.e. that some disputes involving essentially contested concepts can be resolved, but he adds:

> To settle a single question about what to do does not settle anything about the meaning of an essentially contested concept, but essentially contested concepts are born and then die, some factions contesting a concept emerge, or combine with others, or silence the opposition.

Unfortunately, Garver does not support these assertions with examples, rather he immediately goes on to state: "Essentially contested arguments do not advance as the demonstrations and refutations of science are supposed to, but how do they advance?" This question leads Garver to wonder how the total

meaning of an essentially contested concept can develop over time; and in the same vein: "how and why some debates involving essentially contested concepts 'get better' and others do not."[51]

In all, Gallie's article, plus the work of MacIntyre, Care, and Kekes establish a strong, but muddled groundwork for the study of essentially contested concepts. Eugene Garver attempts to clarify the situation by rooting essentially contested concepts in rhetorical argument. Garver, also, raises a series of questions which could provide a starting point in the development of a critical methodology for the analysis discourse influenced by essentially contested concepts. However, before Garver's questions can be answered, a critical summary must be made of all the articles reviewed above in order to develop a clear, integrated interpretation of the nature of essentially contested concepts.

Turning first to Gallie, he contends a concept is essentially contested when two or more sides disagree on the meaning of the concept, but each side refused to accept any definition except its own. Consequently, the disputants will not agree to disagree, nor will they accept an alternative definition. To provide rigor to his initial exposition of the nature of essentially contested concepts, Gallie argues seven conditions must be met by a concept to be essentially contested. In all, the concept must be appraisive and internally complex. As a complex concept, a number of definitions of its nature and goals can be offered and these definitions may change over time. Next, each party must realize that others dispute its definition; and each side should have an idea of how its definition

differs from the opposition's. Concerning the exemplar, Gallie contends all sides must accept its authority. Finally, Gallie argues "continuous competition" between the disputants will serve to sustain and/or develop the exemplar's achievement in "optimum fashion."

MacIntyre appears to accept Gallie's theory in toto, but Norman S. Care contends a dispute over the meaning of an essentially contested concept does not have to be "endless," per Gallie's stipulation. Instead, Care believes it is possible for the disputants to reach "practical closure" in which they come to an agreement among themselves that may last until new parties debate the meaning of the concept. John Kekes also contends the meaning of an essentially contested concept can be resolved, but he goes on to argue that exemplars are unnecessary. Rather, to Kekes, essentially contested concepts center around mutual problems faced by the disputing parties. Eugene Garver attempts to save the exemplar by arguing essentially contested concepts are rooted in rhetorical arguments. Garver then asserts exemplars are analogous to examples, a form of rhetorical argument.

Thus, three areas of disagreement emerge from the literature reviewed above. First, agreement does not exist as to whether the definition of an essentially contested concept can be resolved. Second, it is questionable if an exemplar must exist in order for a concept to be essentially contested. Finally, one theorist contends that essentially contested concepts are rooted in rhetorical argument, whereas the rest do not restrict these concepts to one form of discourse.

Toward an Integrated Viewpoint of the Nature of Essentially Contested Concepts:

Turning to the first area in contention, an answer may be found in an examination of Alfred Schutz's tripartite division of the social world, i.e. the social worlds of contemporaries, predecessors, and successors.[52] With regard to the social world of contemporaries [soziale Mitwelt], Schutz divides its occupants into two groups--"fellow men [Mitmenschen]" and "contemporaries [Nebenmenschen]."[53] The former group consists of those people who coexist with an individual. The latter group consists of those people who live during the same time period of an individual, but with whom the person has no direct contact.[54]

In regard to the social world of predecessors [Vorwelt], Schutz defines it as the "social world that existed before I myself did ["I" in the generic sense of an individual] and which at no point overlaps with any part of my own life."[55] Since this world has preceded the individual, he/she may only study it via artifacts left by its inhabitants. So, a certain degree of uncertainty exists vis-à-vis the individual and the social world which preceded him; but Schutz contends an even higher degree of uncertainty exists concerning the realm of successors [Folgewelt]. Schutz states that this world contains:

> men of whom I know nothing as individuals and with whose subjective experience I can have no personal acquaintance. As a matter of fact, I only know their typical experiences by suggesting that the latter will be the same as those of my contemporaries and my predecessors. This

> is a world which I can only vaguely grasp but never directly experience.[56]

Based on Schutz's analysis, one can argue that the critic of essentially contested concepts could demonstrate quite conclusively that a concept is essentially contested in the social world of his contemporaries; because he has the greatest amount of evidence to work on in this time span. The evidence concerning the social world of the critic's predecessors will not, by definition, be as reliable nor as copious as that of his contemporaries, but careful scholarship could yield a reasonable picture of whether or not a concept was essentially contested during any point of this time span. However, since the critic does not have direct knowledge of the world of his successors, he has no definitive proof that the debate over an essentially contested concept will remain "endless;" hence, practical closure could occur.[57]

Concerning the second area of dispute, one can argue that essentially contested concepts may be rooted in either an exemplar or a problem area, or both. This position may be supported via an examination of the concept of "obedience to the state." The concept fits the first of Gallie's criteria in that those people who believe in obedience to the state generally place some value in the concept, because when citizens are obedient to the state, they get benefits such as fire, police, and military protection. The state values obedience, as obedient citizens are easier to control when and where the state deems control necessary. Second, the concept is internally complex as there are numerous ways to be obedient to a state, e.g. paying taxes, serving in the state's armed forces, obeying

commerce regulations, and following traffic regulations. Thirdly, a number of differing definitions exist about when one should obey the state, as the following examples illustrate: Socrates/Plato argue in the Crito that the citizen must obey all laws and rulings of the state regardless of personal consequences; whereas Crito, a friend of Socrates, argues within the dialogue that one only has to obey laws and rulings which are just.[58] Within the Christian tradition, believers are to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, . . ."[59] Yet, Jesus' command leaves a good degree of latitude in discerning what actually is Caesar's. Thoreau is well known for his refusal to pay war-related taxes; and many draft resistors during the Viet Nam War era refused to fight because they believed the war was unjust. The examples given above also show that, à la Gallie's fourth criterion, the definitions of the concept were modified over time. Lastly, the existence of laws and law enforcement agencies show that most governments recognize that some of their citizens contest the governments' definitions of obedience. Also, when a law enforcement agency apprehends an individual who has not been obedient to the state, the arrest should demonstrate to the person that the government contests his definition of obedience to the state. Thus, the meaning of "obedience to the state" fits the first five requirements established by Gallie. However, per Kekes' stipulations, a definite problem area exists for a state, because civil disobedience can lead to a loss in the state's authority and perhaps a loss of power. On the other side of the debate, those who refuse to obey one or more of the state's regulations, generally

do so as a matter of conscience, or in some cases, as a means of survival or material acquisition. But to Christians, a clear exemplar exists in the life of Jesus, who submitted to the laws of Rome. Yet, Christians and non-Christians may refer to Socrates/Plato's arguments in the Crito as an exemplar for complete obedience to the state, or Thoreau as an exemplar of the opposite. Therefore, clear problem areas exist, but a number of exemplars exist as well; and it is the choice of the disputants whether or not they wish to argue on the basis of an exemplar or expediency. The overall conclusion, then, to be drawn from this discussion, is that both exemplars and problem areas may serve as the basis of disputes over essentially contested concepts.

Finally, with regard to Garver's contention that essentially contested concepts are rooted in rhetorical arguments, this contention is open to question when one closely examines the differences which Garver assumes to exist between rhetorical and dialectical argument. The reader will remember that Garver makes his distinction as follows:

> As opposed to dialectic, rhetorical arguments are never final; the ideal of rhetorical argument is not to silence the opposition forever but to take the opinions of one audience in one situation and make those opinions lead, as best one can to a particular verdict.[60]

However, the definition of dialectic is not as clear cut as Garver would have it appear. In fact, after a careful examination of the nature of both rhetoric and dialectic one finds that both rhetorical and dialectical arguments may contribute to the creation and maintenance of an essentially contested concept.

To support this contention, the following discussion will first explore the nature of dialectic and then examine the role of dialectic in the debate over an essentially contested concept.

Turning to the definition of dialectic, Roland Hall has identified eight major meanings for the term, which range from "sophistical reasoning" to "formal logic."[61] In a more extensive examination of the subject, Richard McKeon traces the development of the term from the time of Zeno of Elea to twentieth century political discourse.[62] McKeon's discussion contains an extensive review of Aristotle's views on dialectic and it is interesting to note that Garver's views on dialectic differ substantially from Aristotle's. This distinction is important to make, as Garver roots his article in an Aristotelian view of rhetorical discourse, but adopts a Platonic view of dialectic. It is this eclectic view of discourse which leads Garver to unnecessarily rule out dialectic from the creation and development of essentially contested concepts. To clarify and support this assertion, a brief review of McKeon's discussion of the Platonic and Aristotelian views on dialectic will be offered, to be followed by an example in which dialectical arguments are used to deal with an essentially contested concept.

First, with regard to Plato's views on dialectic, McKeon states:

> The term "dialectic" and the verb from which it is derived are used in the Platonic dialogues in a range of meanings which extends from discussion and conversation as it was practiced by Socrates, through refinements which distinguish it from the verbal deceptions of eristic and specify its

> employment in the classification of things, to the status of the science of reality.[63]

McKeon elaborates on the last nuance given above by stating:

> Dialectic . . . yields the truest kind of knowledge [to Plato] which has to do with being, reality, and eternal immutability; it treats the assumptions of the other sciences not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses and traces them back to a starting point that requires no assumptions; it provides an account of the essence of each thing; . . .[64]

Consequently, Garver is in agreement with the Platonic conception of dialectic when he contends that it can achieve "final" answers.[65]

Aristotle's view of dialectic does not agree with Plato's, because to Aristotle, dialectic is not the sole method of philosophy nor the "science of sciences." Rather, to Aristotle dialectic deals with:

> . . . probability and opinions rather than of certainty and the nature of things (although it is also the only method by which first principles can be tested and examined indirectly). It is not identified with scientific demonstration, although it may serve to clarify issues and define terms in the absence of scientific proof.[66]

It is important to note that Aristotle places scientific proof within the realm of demonstration; and in doing so, he makes clear distinctions between the premises of demonstration and those of dialectic. Again, McKeon provides a valuable interpretation in this regard when he states that according to Aristotle:

> Demonstration, or apodictic argumentation is contrasted to dialectical and contentious argumentation as well as to misreasoning by the premises on which they depend: demonstration is a syllogism in which the premises are "true and primary" because they "are believed not on the strength of something else but of themselves"; the premises of dialectical argument or syllogisms either start from opinions which seem to be generally accepted but are not or seem to follow from common opinions but do not; . . .[67]

In light of the above analysis, it appears that Garver should have defined his terms more carefully; and if one adopts a consistent Aristotelian view of discourse, both rhetoric and dialectic may be viewed as dealing with the realm of opinion. Since conflicting opinions lead to the debates which make up essentially contested concepts, there is no reason why dialectical arguments may not be used in these debates. This position may be illustrated by referring once again to Plato's Crito, which is generally recognized as an example of dialectical argument.

At the outset of the Crito, Socrates refuses to go along with an escape plan organized by a group of his friends. Socrates bases his refusal on the belief that a citizen must be obedient to all of the laws and edicts of his/her state (43-48). Crito, a friend of Socrates, disagrees and argues the citizen only has to obey the laws and edicts of a state when they are just (46-48). To reach a decision on the matter, Socartes convinces Crito to engage with him in the question and answer format of Socratic dialectic. Socrates' questions center around the idea that a citizen enters into "covenants and agreements" with the state and, therefore, has an obligation to obey whatever

the state demands (49-54). Crito eventually accepts Socrates' analysis and the two subsequently reach practical closure per Norman S. Care's stipulations. But the closure is only for Crito, Socrates, and those who accept the latter's argument, because as demonstrated above, the concept of obedience to the state remained contested in some, if not all, of the social worlds which have followed Socrates/Plato. So in summary, the Crito shows that dialectic can be used in definitional debates over essentially contested concepts and that dialectic does not necessarily achieve "final" answers.

At this point, it is possible to return to the series of questions raised by Garver at the end of his article. His first question asked what kind of standards could be used by an audience to evaluate rhetorical argument. An answer to this may be found by returning to the problem solving approach advocated by Kekes. As will be recalled, Kekes argues that all humans have physiological, social, and psychological needs which must be fulfilled in order for the individual to live a stable life. One could follow a functional approach and contend that a good rhetorical argument from the audience's perspective, would be one that helped them to satisfy their basic needs. However, such gratification would have to be consistent with the ethical, moral, and (if applicable) the religious views of the audience; unless the rhetorical argument(s) could aid them in achieving a more functional approach to ethics, morals, and religion.

Garver's second question dealt with how theorists should evaluate essentially contested arguments. This essay has argued

that the arguments used in the debates concerning essentially contested concepts may be rhetorical and/or dialectical in nature. Thus, they are open to all of the major forms of discourse analysis, e.g. genre criticism, Burkeian criticism, analogue criticism, fantasy-theme analysis, neo-Aristotelian criticism, neo-classical criticism, and a number of eclectic variations of all of the above.

Garver, also, seeks an answer to the question of "how and why some debates involving essentially contested concepts get better and others do not."[68] The answer to this question cuts across all of the methodologies listed above, because in order for the debates to take place about essentially contested contested concepts, some form of framework for communication must exist, be it a feeling of unity or just an agreement to discuss the issues in dispute. For example, on the interpersonal level it is impossible for two or more people to resolve a dispute if they refuse to exchange intelligible communications. The same holds on the inter-group level; and in both cases the communication process could be facilitated by elements such as a common language, common (or similar) political backgrounds, and common (or similar) cultural backgrounds. But a significant problem is faced by a group when their framework for communication is based, theoretically, on an essentially contested concept, because if they cannot agree on the definition of the concept, how can they go on to work on other questions of mutual interest? the answer to this question lies in the use of what may be called substitution issues.[69] To illustrate the use of such issues, one

may return to the concept of Christianity. As indicated earlier, Gallie showed the essentially contested nature of the concept. However, the ecumenical movement has sought to join all of the Christian sects into one united body of believers. In effect, the joint work and communication of this united body of believers would be based on the concept of Christianity. But the goal of unification has not been reached; a major factor in this failure has been the inability of many sects to reach mutual agreement on key issues such as the nature of communion, the nature of Christ, and the means of salvation. Yet, a number of Christian organizations have been able to work together on what is called the "social gospel." The social gospel is based on a passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus says that those who feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the needy, and visit the sick and impoverished will be acting as if they are doing these kind deeds to Jesus himself.[70] Thus, working to better social conditions may be viewed as an element of the Christian life. Hence, a number of Christian sects could and have worked together in bettering the conditions of the less fortunate. Consequently, the members of the sects have focused down to one element of the essentially contested concept of Christianity and have allowed it to substitute for the whole concept.[71] Therefore, since the people only agree on one issue, their discourse which is aimed toward persuading others to join their cause will most likely focus on the only issue where agreement exists. The critic of such discourse will greatly enhance his understanding of it by looking for the elements which comprise

the essentially contested concept as well as the nature of the substitution issue or set of substitution issues. In the process, the critic should recognize the possibility that the substitution issue(s) could be adopted on a permanent basis, i.e., the groups could abandon their allegiance to the essentially contested concept and reach closure around the substitution issue(s).[72]

In terms of a more immediate form of closure, the central contentions of this essay may be summarized as follows: First, essentially contested concepts may be grounded in a problem area and/or an historical exemplar. Second, essentially contested concepts may be rooted in rhetorical and/or dialectical argument. Thirdly, practical closure may be reached by a number of groups who once disputed the meaning of an essentially contested concept. However, if the groups are unable to reach practical closure, they may continue their dispute, or reach a form of unity around one or more substitution issues, an action which could allow them to chart a new map of reality which may or may not represent a Bohemian coastline.

Endnotes:

[1]Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), pp. 3-32.

[2]Ibid., p. 27.

[3]Ibid., p. 16.

[4]Ibid.

[5]See: George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 1-41. For a full account of Watson's views, see: John B. Watson, Behaviorism (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1924).

[6]W.B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 56 (March 12, 1956): 167-198.

[7]Ibid., p. 167.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., p. 168.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., pp. 168-169.

[14]Ibid., 180-181.

[15]Ibid., pp. 180-192. Gallie also offers a hypothetical essentially contested concept which centers around the concept of championship in a hypothetical sports league.

[16]Ibid., pp. 171-172.

[17]Ibid., p. 180.

[18]Ibid., p. 181.

[19]Ibid., p. 182.

[20]Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts," Ethics 84 (October, 1973): 1-9.

[21]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[22]Ibid., p. 3.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., p. 4.

[25]Norman S. Care, "On Fixing Social Concepts," Ethics 84 (October, 1973): 10-21.

[26]Ibid., pp. 10-16.

[27]Ibid., p. 14.

[28]John Kekes, "Essentially Contested Concepts: A Reconsideration," Philosophy and Rhetoric 10 (Spring, 1977): 71-89.

[29]Ibid., p. 73.

[30]Ibid., p. 77.

[31]See: Ibid., pp. 77-82.

[32]See: Ibid., pp. 77-89.

[33]Ibid., p. 82.

[34]Ibid., p. 83.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid., pp. 84-86.

[39]Eugene Garver, "Rhetoric and Essentially Contested Arguments," Philosophy and Rhetoric 11 (Summer, 1978): 156-172.

[40]Ibid., p. 159.

[41]Ibid. It should be noted that Garver uses the terms "rhetorical argument" and "essentially contested argument" interchangably.

[42]Ibid., p. 160.

[43]Ibid. All of the rest of the quotations in this paragraph are taken from p. 160 as well.

[44]Ibid., p. 160.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid. The emphasis is Garver's.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., p. 162.

[50]Ibid., p. 169. The rest of the quotations in the paragraph, except for the last one are taken from p. 169.

[51]Ibid., p. 170. In addition to the literature reviewed above, the notion of essentially contested concepts is used by William E. Connolly in his: The Terms of Political Discourse (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974). Connolly only uses three of Gallie's criteria for identifying essentially contested concepts, i.e. the concept must be appraisive, internally complex, and "relatively" open. See pp. 10-41. Connolly does not explain why he drops the other criteria, but his work is an interesting example of how the notion of essentially contested concepts may be applied to the analysis of political discourse. It should also be noted that Clifford Geertz makes a passing reference to the notion of essentially contested concepts in his: The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973). See p. 18. Also Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik refer to "essentially contested issues" in their: An Introduction to Reasoning (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979) See pp. 212-127, 271-273, 293-297, and p. 318.

[52]Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 142-143.

[53]Ibid., p. 142.

[54]Ibid., pp. 142-143. A literal translation of the German word mitmenschen is "people you are in the company of." A literal translation of nebenmenschen is "people you are alongside of."

[55]Ibid., p. 143.

[56]Ibid.

[57]One could, therefore, say the word "essentially" means that debates over essentially contested concepts argue the meaning of the concept's essence and not that the contest is an essential part of the concept.

[58]For a complete text of the dialogue, see: Plato, Crito in The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English: With Analyses and Introductions, B. Jowett, 2n ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1875), pp. 379-396.

[59]The command appears in verse twenty-one of the twenty-second chapter of the book of Matthew. The translation used in the text is from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

[60]Garver, p. 170.

[61]Roland Hall, "Dialectic," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967) vol. 2, pp. 385-389.

[62]Richard McKeon, "Dialectic and Political Thought and Action," Ethics 65 (October, 1954): 1-33.

[63]Ibid., p. 4.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Garver, p. 159.

[66]McKeon, pp. 4-5.

[67]Ibid., p. 5. It should be noted that I accept the premise that truth exists and, therefore, agree with Aristotle that demonstration is based on truth.

[68]Garver, p. 171.

[69]Clearly substitution issues function in a manner analogous to what Edward Sapir calls "condensation symbols." The latter, according to Sapir, are a "condensed form of substitutive behavior for direct expression. . ." used "for the ready release of emotional tension in conscious or unconscious form." I contend that what I call substitution issues do not require the emotional or psychological underpinnings of condensation symbols in order to function as a means of avoiding another issue, event or concept. Consequently, substitution issues may be effective devices for achieving unity when a group has diverse needs that cannot be covered by a common condensation symbol, or do not require the emotional or psychological release offered by such symbols. For Sapir's discussion of condensation symbols, see his: "Symbolism," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), pp. 492-495.

[70]The passage in question may be found in the twenty-fifth chapter of the book of Matthew, verses thirty-one to forty.

[71]An illustration of the extent to which the social gospel may be applied can be seen in the following statement made by an American who witnessed the recent Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua:

> The Nicaraguan struggle for liberation, and the struggle for many of the Central American countries and Latin American countries is a

> national struggle. It's a struggle that's based basically [sic] on Christian principals, and this is why you have so many people from the churches, both priests and laymen, involved in the struggle, because it's one of living out the gospel. People who believe in Jesus Christ and believe in His message of bringing freedom from all the things that bind the poor to the poor and the oppressed, is the message of the gospel that's being lived out in Latin America today.

The quotation is taken from the transcript of Scan #244 "Mary and the New Nicaragua," September 2, 1979, p. 3. Scan is a radio program produced by the United Methodist Church and the American Lutheran Church, Box 122, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55440.

[72]If Mary is correct, this appears to be the case in Latin America.